



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 14, 2023

Resources and Development Committee advocates for Navajo Nation priorities on Capitol Hill



PHOTO: (L to R) Last week, members of the Resource and Development Committee met with Congressional leaders to advocate for priorities regarding abandoned uranium mines, carbon sequestration, and the mineral rights of Navajo allotment owners.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s Resources and Development Committee (RDC) met with Congressional leaders, White House officials, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week, to advocate for priorities related to abandoned uranium mines, carbon sequestration, and the mineral rights of Navajo allotment owners near the Chaco National Historical Park.

RDC Chair Brenda Jesus (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To’ii), and RDC members Shawna Ann Claw (Chinle) and Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) met with officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to discuss the ongoing work to assess and prioritize the cleanup of abandoned uranium mine sites through the EPA’s Superfund program.

RDC members also requested the EPA’s support to add the Lukachukai Mountains Mining District site to the Superfund list. The site is located primarily in the communities of Cove, Round Rock, and Lukachukai and includes over 100 former uranium/vanadium mine waste piles. Mining activities impacted soil and sediment which polluted portions of the Lukachukai Mountains and the Cove and Lukachukai valleys.

“As the legislative oversight for natural resources, the cleanup of abandoned uranium mines is a top priority for the Resources and Development Committee. Our discussions with the EPA were very productive and we look forward to seeing the Lukachukai Mountains Mining District being added to the Superfund list and the restoration of more former uranium sites throughout the Navajo Nation,” said RDC Chair Jesus.

During several visits to Capitol Hill, RDC members also met with democrat and republican members of Congress to discuss concerns related to the recent action by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to withdraw lands for a 20-year period around the Chaco National Historical Park from future leasing and mining claims, which has devastating impacts for many Navajo allotment owners and their families. Despite claims from the Department of the Interior that the withdrawal does not apply to Navajo-owned allotment lands, the Secretary’s action completely diminishes the economic feasibility of the mineral rights of the allotment owners.

On April 27, the Navajo Nation Council’s Naabik’iyatí Committee approved Resolution NA-BIAP-11-23, opposing the withdrawal of approximately 351,000 acres of public land surrounding Chaco Canyon. At the same time, the Committee rescinded the Navajo Nation’s previous position supporting a five-mile buffer zone. RDC members continue to work with congressional members to seek a resolution that supports the rights of Navajo allotment owners.

“We stand with our Navajo people who rely on their mineral rights for income to support their families and livelihood. Navajo Nation leaders and the allottees did not receive sufficient consultation and Secretary Haaland never met directly with the people who are most impacted by the land withdrawal. We continue to be open to discussing the matter with Secretary Haaland as we work with congressional members to look at other options,” said Delegate Simpson.

RDC members also met with the White House’s Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Deputy Director for Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Sequestration, Sarah Leung, to continue advocating for the Navajo Nation’s agreement for development of a forest carbon project through participation in the California Air Resources Board’s carbon cap and reduction program, which would enable the Nation to sell carbon credits. This is an initiative that RDC member Council Delegate Rickie Nez (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) worked on under the previous Council.

The Resources and Development Committee will continue to meet with federal officials and congressional members to move the priorities of the Navajo Nation forward.

###